

The Lion

October 1996

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A merely parochial publication for members only of St. Mark's Parish, Denver, Colorado.

The Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Western Rite Vicariate.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."

The Ask Etheldreda column has been pre-empted by this urgent essay rushed to our office by the saintly Etheldreda herself:

Complete Idiots "doing Theology" Swarm over America like Fleas on a Dog.

Last night on one of the PBS Channels my sister Sexburga and I accidentally found a round table discussion of what was billed as "great academic minds" probing the "great questions" of nature, man, and God. I think the title was something like "the glorious accident" or something such.

The convener continually pressed an infantile materialism upon the group and the viewers with obvious glee and no small amount of aggressive disdain for non-materialist thoughts.

With obvious relish he repeated a text of correspondence between the late Charles Darwin and some long extinguished light of English pietistic preaching. The Darwin argument went..., "I disprove the existence of a loving God by the example of the wasp who lays her eggs in the body of ... (some kind of worm or bug) ... wherein the young devour their host after they hatch." This was uttered with some sense of having disproved the possibility of any god with any moral character whatever.

I then realized that not only is imbecilic philosophy being taught as "biology" or "science" in most of the grammar and secondary schools of America, but also, and with no more wit, at the University level.

What tribe of primitives who ever lived on earth formed their concept of their God from the mating or feeding habits of insects? Only in England and America, and only among "scientists" and

"philosophers" doing "theology" at the highest levels of what passes for the Academy.

To say, with Darwin, that God must be like the feeding or mating or hygienic habits of animals is to say "look at the centipede, God has one hundred legs," or "look at the potato, God is starchy" or "look at the wasp and the wolf, God is a merciless hunter" or "look at the baboon, God has lice" or "look at the MTV adolescent, God is a clueless booze brain looking for a cigarette vending machine" ... and so on. This argument offers that there is no God, or at least no God of any goodness, because His creatures are disgusting little varmint.

This is like the old Seminary joke, "How can there be a God if there are ... people in the world who are hungry... or wars in the name of religion... or ants at the picnic... or my aunt Matilda has ringworm... or my V12 Pierce Arrow was wiped out by a Mack truck on I-80 west of Omaha... or...," so on and on through countless tedious hours of Tenth grade biology and Graduate School philosophy and PBS programming ad nauseam.

The really sad thing is that, just as the Chair of the Philosophy Department I knew twenty years ago in College (I think his name was G. Webster), most of these amateur "theologians" are operating at about the level of a second grade Nazarene Sunday School and punching at the straw god they last knew way back when. What is even sadder is that thousands of young people are processed through these witless lectures as persons who have no spiritual resources and who think they are smart enough to be cultured despisers of religion.

They are deceived and they are missing the whole life of the Spirit and Heart and Mind by mental bondage to a stupid, thoughtless, materialist, world view. How sad.



OUR LADY OF WALSHINGHAM is observed on October 16 with Morning Prayer at 11:45 AM and Mass at 12:10 noon.

Devotions will be in the OLW Chapel at St. Mark's, easily reached by way of the west door at the ground level.

"Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ."

IN this LION find:

- Ask Etheldreda hot on the topic of vulgar theology in the classroom
- Thomas Reeves on the subject of "What Americans Believe"
- The "free rider" problem in churches
- Parish News and Kalendar

The Usual Suspects from various summer events



Jody Oppermann with clergy Allen Elder and Jack Nahrstadt at the Evangelism Conference



Lindsey Korbitz on her
Chrismation Day



Ray, Dan, and Ed at the mens' luncheon on the south lawn

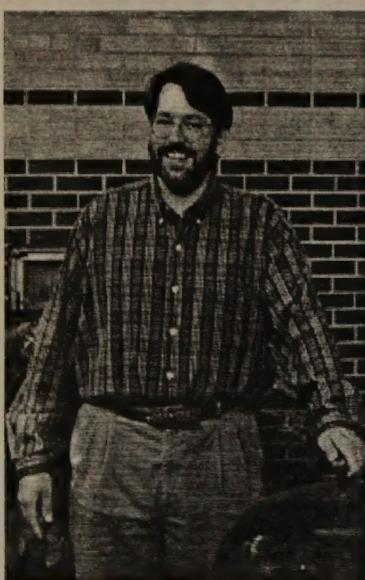


Bishop Basil with Fr. David, Fr. John, Fr. Lester Michael Bundy

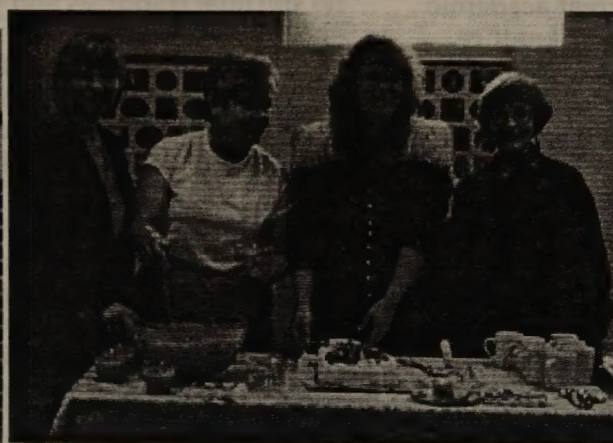


The Reverend
Father Anthony
Miller, Keith
Parker, Fr. John,
Nora Parker,
Karla Miller,
Luke Miller, and
Presbytera Kim
Miller
following
Sunday lunch, c.
1951.

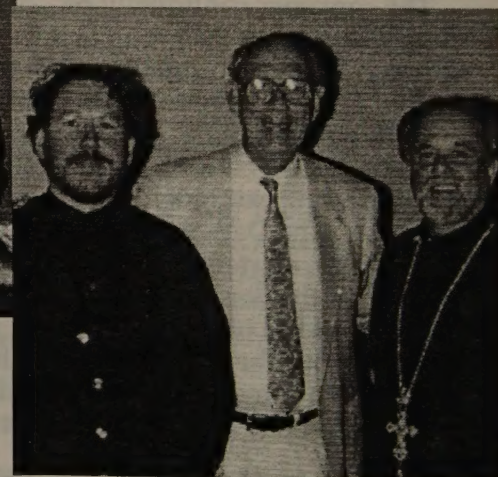
Not shown are
Kim's parents,
Ed. and Jody
Oppermann who
were organizing
the taking the
picture.



Subdeacon James, the Church Warden and cook for the mens luncheon.



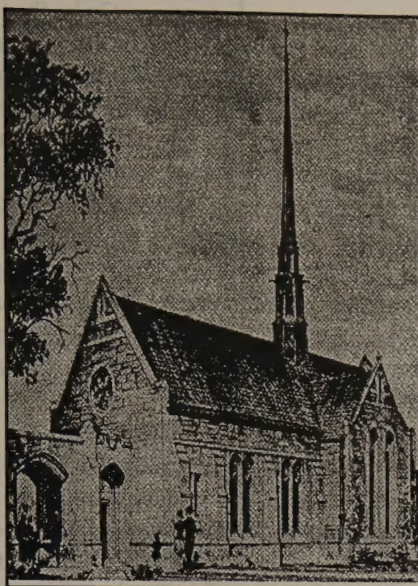
Sandy, Karen, Kathryn, Stuart,
at the Church Womens' Tea



Fr. John, Ed. Oppermann,
The V. Revd. Fr.
Constantine, at the Evangelism
Conference

What do Americans Believe?

Thomas Reeves has written a new book, *The Empty Church, the decline of Liberal Protestantism*, (Free Press 1996), and an essay published in *First Things* (October 1996). While waiting for the book, we excerpt some paragraphs from his essay:



IN 1988, the highly respected Gallup Organization reported that nine Americans in ten said they never doubted the existence of God, eight in ten said they believed they will be called before God on Judgment day to answer for their sins, eight in ten believed that God still works miracles, and seven in ten believed in life after death. Moreover, 90 percent prayed, 88 percent believed that God loved them, 78 percent said they had given "a lot" or "a fair amount" of thought to their relationship with God during the past two years, and 86 percent said they wanted religious training for their children.

Natural law? Seventy-nine percent believed that There are clear guidelines about what's good and evil that apply to everyone regardless of the situation." Traditional moral standards? Gallup found 36 percent were conservative on the subject, 52 percent moderate, and only 11 percent liberal.

A whopping 84 percent said that Jesus was God or the Son of God, about three-quarters had at some time or other sensed Jesus' presence in their lives, and 66 percent reported having made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Even 72 percent of the unchurched said they believed that Jesus was God or the Son of God, up from 64 percent in 1978. Almost half of all Protestants described themselves as born again Christians.

How can that much faith exist in a secular society? If 84 percent of its people believe that Jesus Christ was what he said he was, doesn't that by definition qualify the United States as a Christian country? Gallup concluded that "the degree of religious orthodoxy found among Americans is simply amazing.... Such a nation cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as secular in its core beliefs."

A mere 8 percent of Americans were without a religious preference, and even they, in the words of Gallup, "express a surprising degree of interest in religion and religious belief." (That figure was reconfirmed in a 1994 Gallup poll.) In one survey, 69 percent of blacks and 61 percent of all Americans expressed a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in organized religion. Baby boomers, while less involved in religion than other Americans, were more likely than others to report that they were more interested in religion than they were five years earlier.

In 1990, a poll of 113,000 people around the nation commissioned by the Graduate School of the City University of New York found that only 7.5 percent of those surveyed said they had no religion, while 86.5 percent of Americans were Christians. Jews, with 1.8 percent, were the largest non-Christian faith. (Gallup polls described Jews as highly secular. Only 30 percent called religion "very important" and only one in five attended synagogue in the week before being interviewed.)

Gallup polls taken in 1991 showed a modest rise in religiousness in America over the previous three years. Christians were 82 percent of the adult population. (This figure held steady three years later, with 58 percent of the population

being Protestant and 25 percent being Catholic.) About seven out of ten adults reported membership in a church or synagogue (a level reached in the 1970s that remained the same in 1994). Eighty-six percent of teens said they believed that Jesus Christ is God or the Son of God, and 73 percent considered regular church attendance an important aspect of American citizenship. Fifty nine percent of interviewees said they agreed completely that a personal faith in Jesus Christ was the only assurance of eternal life, and another 17 percent agreed "somewhat." Eighty-one percent believed the Bible to be the literal (32 percent) or inspired (49 percent) word of God.

In 1992, the sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, following a careful analysis of data collected by the Bureau of Census and others, concluded that on the eve of the American Revolution only about 17 percent of Americans belonged to churches. By the start of the Civil War the figure was 37 percent, by 1906 it was slightly more than half, and in 1926 this had increased to 56 percent. The numbers continued to rise until by 1980 church adherence was about 62 percent. In short, America appeared to be more religious in the year Ronald Reagan was elected President than in the days of the Founding Fathers.

A 1994 USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll found that 70 percent belonged to a church or synagogue and that 66 percent attended services at least once a month. David Roozen of the Center for Social and Religious Research, Hartford Seminary, said that overall membership and attendance statistics "have remained stable over the last ten or fifteen years." The same poll showed that nine adults in ten believed in a heaven and that 79 percent believed in miracles.

Gallup reported that same year that 51 percent of the public said grace before meals either always or frequently, and that only 14 percent never did. Seventy-three percent of adults favored a constitutional amendment to allow voluntary prayer in the public schools. Sixty-two percent believed that religion could solve all or most of the day's problems, a figure that had remained steady

for twenty years.

A Harris poll taken in July 1994 revealed that 95 percent of those surveyed believed in God and 90 percent believed in heaven. Of the four in five Americans who described themselves as Christians, 89 percent believed in life after death, 87 percent in miracles, and 85 percent in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Even 52 percent of the non-Christians surveyed expressed belief in the Resurrection!

A New York Times/CBS News poll in December 1994 found that 64 percent of adults believed that "organized prayer" should be permitted in the public schools. Six in ten public school students agreed. Gallup reported that American confidence in and support of organized religion reached a ten-year high mark in 1995. The index number had risen fifteen points since 1988.

Richard John Neuhaus has declared, "Statistically at least, America is as much a Christian nation as it ever was, and perhaps more so." He contends that "one of the most elementary facts about America is that its people are overwhelmingly Christian in their own understanding, and that they and many who are not Christian assume that the moral baseline of the society is the Judeo-Christian ethic."

And yet Billy Graham could declare that America was no longer a Christian or Protestant nation. It is, he said, "a secular country in which thousands of Christians live and have substantial influence." A prominent Roman Catholic theologian, Father Avery Dulles, was of the same mind, arguing that the country's moral breakdown was threatening democracy. In 1994, the Jewish medical educator David C. Stolinsky lamented the loss of the Christian values that dominated America in the 1950s. "The reason we fear to go out after dark is not that we may be set upon by bands of evangelicals and forced to read the New Testament, but that we may be set upon by gangs of feral young people who have been taught that nothing is superior to their own needs or feelings."

Is modern America secular or Christian? We seem to be the most religious nation in the advanced industrialized West but at the same time appear to be blatantly, even aggressively, secular. Scholars, clergy, judges, journalists, and others have pondered the paradox for years.

A truly secular society would have numbers approximating those found in, say, Great Britain, France, or Scandinavia, where interest in God is minimal and church attendance is extremely low (about 2.2 percent in the Church of England on an average Sunday). The historian Alan D. Gilbert has defined a thoroughly secular culture as "one in which norms, values, and modes of interpreting reality, together with the symbols and rituals which express and reinforce them, have been emancipated entirely from assumptions of human dependence on supernatural agencies or influences." That is not a description of American culture—at any time.

Still, the public tells pollsters (64 percent in 1991) that there are few moral absolutes. More people (43 percent) say they rely upon their personal experience instead of outside authorities when weighing issues of right and

wrong. Only three persons in ten view Scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of truth. That this seems to contradict other polling data about faith and morals has not escaped the attention of the pollsters themselves, who talk about public ambiguity in distinguishing good from evil.

This ambiguity is in part a reflection of the individualism inherent in Protestantism and the Enlightenment. Americans, among many others, have long claimed the right to define truth as they see it. The uncertainty also reveals the genuine difficulty facing all of us in knowing exactly how to respond to complex issues in the modern world.

Abortion is the classic case. A CBS News poll taken in January 1995 showed that while 46 percent of the respondents said that abortion was the same thing as murder, half of those said it still was sometimes necessary. Two presidential families, the Reagans and the Bushes, were divided over the issue. Quarrels over economic redistribution, immigration, welfare, the legalization of drugs, gun control, capital punishment, human embryo research, and other issues are commonplace and inevitable.

And yet for all our disagreements, we are far from being moral idiots—without a past, bereft of authority, and compelled to reinvent basic truths as we go. Pre-Christian peoples, of course, had a strong sense of right and wrong. As the Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten has observed, "The idea of a law rooted in the nature of humanity and the world and discoverable by reason has been traced back to the 'dawn of conscience.'"

No civilization has been completely at bay about right and wrong. There have been differences about morality, to be sure, but they have not been total. For all of the rich diversity of detail, there is, and has always been, a vital framework written on human hearts and minds by the Creator. C. S. Lewis has written, "Think of a country where people were admired for running away from battle, or where a man felt proud of double-crossing all the people who had been kindest to him. You might just as well try to imagine a country where two and two made five.... Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked."

All major American reform movements have appealed to eternal truth to buttress their crusades. The civil rights movement is an obvious example. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his famous letter from Birmingham jail, wrote of "the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage" and contended "that there are two types of laws: just and unjust.... I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.' The pro-life movement claims unequivocally that it is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, arguing, as reformers do, that what may be legal can still be immoral.

When 79 percent of the American people declare faith in clear guidelines about what is right and wrong, they are expressing a commitment to what Neuhaus calls a "moral baseline" long accepted in our culture and

October 1996

Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Sat

The big Parish event this month is the four ring circus on SATURDAY, 26 October : Crafters' Fair, English Tea, Bake Sale, and St. Edward Martyr Yard Sale !!!

6
JCC 10 years at St. Mark's & 5 years Orthodox Priest
Ann Armstrong BD
7:30 AM Morning Prayer
8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon
9:00 AM Church School
10:00 AM Divine Liturgy
4:00 PM Evensong

7
feria

8
feria

9
St. Denis,
11:45 AM Morning Prayer
12:10 PM Mass

10
St. Paulinus of York
9:00 AM Mass
7:00 PM Evensong

11
feria
Susan Tripp BD
9:00 AM Mass

12
St. Wilfred of York
9:00 AM Mass
5:30 PM Evensong

His Grace, Bishop Basil will be at St. Luke's Church for the consecration of their building. All are welcome! October 19, Saturday, 5 PM Vespers & Reception.

13
18 Trinity
Christopher Rife BD
Laura Graham BD
7:30 AM Morning Prayer
8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon
9:00 AM Church School
10:00 AM Divine Liturgy
4:00 PM Evensong

14
St. Callistus
7:00 PM
Vestry

15
Our Lady of Walsingham
Pam Howlett BD

16
Catherine Herrell BD
OLW Observed
11:45 AM Morning Prayer
12:10 PM Mass

17
Vigil of St. Luke
9:00 AM Mass
7:00 PM Evensong

18
Kayla Marie Goyette BD
ST. LUKE
9:00 AM Mass

19
Brian Goyette BD
St. Frideswide
9:00 AM Mass

20
19 Trinity
Abbie Eliz Stout BD
7:30 AM Morning Prayer
8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon
9:00 AM Church School
10:00 AM Divine Liturgy
4:00 PM Evensong

21
St. Hilarion

22
Ss. Ursula and Companions

23
feria
11:45 AM Morning Prayer
12:10 PM Mass

24
St. Raphael the Archangel
9:00 AM Mass
7:00 PM Evensong

25
Ss. Crysanthus & Daria
9:00 AM Mass

26
9 AM to 4 PM
Crafters' Fair,
English Tea,
St. Edward
Yard Sale
7:30 AM Mass
5:30 PM Evensong

27
20 Trinity/Christ the King
7:30 AM Morning Prayer
8:00 AM Holy Communion & Sermon
9:00 AM Church School
10:00 AM Divine Liturgy
4:00 PM Evensong

28
Maryalice Western BD
Ss. Simon and Jude

29
Betsy Huseby BD
feria
Karen Colbert BD

30
feria
11:45 AM Morning Prayer
12:10 PM Mass

31
All Hallows Eve (vigil of All Saints)
9:00 AM Mass
7:00 PM Evensong

All Saints Day will be observed with Mass at 9:00 AM and 7:00 PM on November 1. All Souls Day will be observed with Mass at 9:00 AM on November 2, Saturday.

elsewhere. A majority of Americans understand, at least in general, what is expected of them by a power beyond their own wills. They know, for example, that personal integrity, being generous to the poor, and honoring marriage vows are virtues that do not go out of style. (The University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center found in 1992 that 91 percent of the American people think extramarital affairs are bad and that the overwhelming percentage of married people remain faithful.) In 1994, the social scientist Robert Wuthnow published a study in which he asked two thousand working Americans what was "absolutely essential" or "very important" to their basic sense of worth as a person. "Your family" ranked first, followed immediately by "Your moral standards." Ninety seven percent of weekly churchgoers and 93 percent of the total labor force endorsed this choice.

Simply labeling America Christian, however, is inadequate. We must ask what sort of Christianity lives in the hearts and minds of most Americans in the late 1990s. It is clearly something unlike the faith practiced by third-century hermits, St. Francis of Assisi, or Martin Luther. Christianity has always absorbed elements of the culture of its adherents, and it is important to consider how extensively the classic faith has been altered by a modern, literate, prosperous, technologically driven society undeniably absorbed with obtaining prosperity, security, and pleasure. In short, what is the content of our Christianity?

First, our faith is not inextricably tied to our churches. Polls show that a majority of Americans have confidence in organized religion. But in 1988, according to Gallup, 44 percent of Americans were unchurched (people who said they were not members of any church or had not attended services in the previous six months other than for special religious holidays, weddings, funerals, or the like.) That figure amounted to about seventy-eight million adults. Gallup found that overwhelming majorities, church and unchurched, agreed that people "should arrive at their religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue" and that one can be a good Christian or Jew without attending a church or synagogue. Gallup discovered in polls taken in 1992 and 1995 that confidence in the clergy was at 54 percent of the populace, down from 67 percent in 1985.

When asked why they attended church less often, very few of those interviewed gave reasons that reflected a deep animosity toward organized religion. Only 8 percent said they disagreed with policies and teachings. A mere 5 percent said they were atheists or agnostics. For many, going to church did not seem that important. Leading the list were 34 percent who were "too busy."

Religious individualism seems to be at the core of American Christianity. This is a characteristic in harmony with our historic sense of personal independence as well as the considerable socioeconomic mobility we have long enjoyed. Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney concluded, "Typically Americans view religious congregations as gatherings of individuals who

have chosen to be together, in institutions of their own making and over which they hold control—fostering what sometimes, in the eyes of observers from other countries, appears as 'churchless Christianity.'" For Americans, "religious authority lies in the believer—not in the church, not in the Bible, despite occasional claims of infallibility and inerrancy on the part of some."

In 1993, a much publicized and controversial study conducted by the sociologists Mark Chaves and Kirk Hadaway and the religion professor Penny Long Marler concluded that only 19.6 percent of Protestants and 28 percent of Catholics were in church in any given week. Only about 16 percent of self-defined Episcopalians attended worship during a typical week. The researchers challenged the many telephone surveys conducted by Gallup and other pollsters, and suggested that Americans felt a need to appear more religious, and more respectable, than they really were.

Christianity in modern America also tends to be superficial. For one thing, its adherents are poorly educated in the faith. Gallup refers to "a nation of biblical illiterates" and presents solid evidence: only four in ten Americans know that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount; fewer than half of all adults can name the four Gospels of the New Testament; only three in ten teenagers know why Easter is celebrated. "More than half of all Americans read the Bible less than once a month," Gallup reports, "including 24 percent who say they never read it and 6 percent who can't recall the last time they read the Bible."

Of course, given the fervently secular nature of the media and education at all levels, this illiteracy should not be surprising. It will no doubt increase. The young people who leave the mainline churches in droves are surely no exceptions. If Sunday Schools are teaching about condoms and poverty in Rwanda, there is little time for things like Scripture and church history. And if the clergy present the faith merely as a branch of anthropology or social work, there is little need for anyone to be informed.

A study by the Search Institute of Minneapolis in 1990 revealed that large majorities of mainliners did not read the Bible when alone. The Presbyterians headed the list (77 percent), followed by the Lutherans (75 percent), the United Church of Christ (68 percent), the United Methodists (65 percent), and the Disciples of Christ (62 percent).

According to Gallup, only slightly more than half of the Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians believe in the devil, while roughly the same numbers accept ESP. Fifty-six percent of the Lutherans and 49 percent of the Methodists believe in UFOs. A third of the Methodists and 31 percent of the Presbyterians believe in astrology. While 73 percent of the American people believe in hell, 77 percent believe their own prospects for going to heaven are excellent or good.

An in-depth random survey of 4,001 Americans, conducted by a team of political scientists and published in 1993, concluded that 30 percent of Americans are

totally secular in outlook, 29 percent are barely or nominally religious, 22 percent are modestly religious, and only 19 percent—about thirty-six million people—regularly practice their religion. In measuring mainline Protestants (16.7 percent of those studied), for example, the researchers considered church attendance, membership, personal prayer, belief in life after death, and how "important" respondents said religion was in their lives. Those who registered some activity in all five categories were considered "committed" and qualified as part of the 19 percent. "We're not talking about Mother Teresas," said the political scientist John C. Green. "We're looking at people who meet a religious minimum according to their own traditions." In short, if this study is accurate, the vibrant faith pollsters hear about during their telephone interviews is exaggerated and not vitally linked with much of the public's attitudes and actions.

The superficiality of the Christianity expressed by a large majority of Americans can also be seen, of course, in the destructive behavior that increasingly mars our daily lives. Pious rhetoric is not necessarily an indication of a deep-seated, life-changing commitment.

Consider the violence, the insensitivity, and the staggering vulgarity we encounter—and enjoy—in the media. There are 1.5 million abortions a year, and abortion is a \$450 million a year business. Venereal diseases are rampant. African Americans are killing each other, going to prison, and succumbing to an assortment of addictions in record numbers. "American blacks are, by some measure," Gallup reports, "the most religious people in the world." Drug abuse among teenagers was reported in 1995 to be still on the rise. Between 1992 and 1995, the proportion of eighth graders using illicit drugs almost doubled; among tenth graders it jumped by nearly two-thirds; among seniors it escalated by nearly half. "We have become," said William Bennett, "the kind of society that civilized countries used to send missionaries to."

Then, too, there are priorities. It is one thing to tell a pollster, perhaps in complete sincerity, that family and personal moral values are our chief concerns. But most of us, it seems clear, expend the great bulk of our time and energies fulfilling the American dream. We are consumed by our jobs, as psychiatrists, divorce lawyers, and millions of latchkey children know all too well, and are locked into an endless pursuit of the power, cash, status, and pleasure that promise "personal fulfillment" and happiness. Probably few clergy address this issue (there is the budget to meet), and, as Robert Wuthnow puts it, "we therefore go about our lives pretty much the same as those who have no faith at all."

At the same time we are slaving away to obtain the "finer" things in life, we publicly profess a strong distaste for materialism. We are able, following a long tradition in Western civilization, to divide the spiritual from the material realms of existence. The dichotomy makes us somewhat uneasy, but we persist nonetheless.

People who do not know who gave the Sermon on the Mount may not have read about the rich man and the eye

of the needle. More than likely they do know about the warning and have chosen either to ignore it or explain it away—an endeavor long perfected by the wealthy and their minions. In any case, earthly comfort and security, Scripture tells us, are perilous goals for Christians.

Christianity in modern America is, in large part, innocuous. It tends to be easy, upbeat, convenient, and compatible. It does not require self-sacrifice, discipline, humility, an otherworldly outlook, a zeal for souls, a fear as well as love of God. There is little guilt and no punishment, and the payoff in heaven is virtually certain.

The faith has been overwhelmed by the culture, producing what is rightly called cultural Christianity. This is not a question of mere influence; acculturation takes place at all times and in all places. Christianity becomes cultural Christianity when the faith is dominated by a culture to the point that it loses much or most of its authenticity.

What we now have might best be labeled consumer Christianity. The psychologist Paul C. Vitz has observed, "The 'divine right' of the consumer to choose as he or she pleases has become so common an idea that it operates in millions of Americans like an unconscious tropism." Millions of Americans today feel free to buy as much of the full Christian faith as seems desirable. The cost is low and customer satisfaction seems guaranteed.

America is not—not yet, anyway—a thoroughly secular society. But its Christianity, in large part, has been watered down and is at ease with basic secular premises about personal conduct and the meaning of life. Such a religion has an uncertain future, for it has absorbed ideas and attitudes that may well lead to its demise. Authentic Christianity and the world are by definition at odds. That was decreed repeatedly and unequivocally by the Founder. The Disciple whom Jesus loved made the truth crystal clear when he wrote: "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.... We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one."

There are still millions of Christians in this country, in many denominations, who cling to the scriptural and traditional faith and the morality that comes with it. They may ingest more than a bit of the worst parts of their culture; it is virtually impossible not to. But their primary allegiance is to the supernatural and living faith embraced by orthodox Christians for almost two thousand years.

In our time, a great many such people are worried and angry about the secularism, violence, cynicism, and despair they see welling up about them. One Wisconsin evangelical exclaimed in 1994, "The once unthinkable is now almost commonplace, and we feel as though we are riding on a wagon out of control, careening down a hill. It is no progress to continue on the wrong path which our culture has already traveled so far." The evidence strongly suggests that the simile is on target. How we got into that wagon and began our wild ride downhill requires much attention.

The "Free Rider" Problem and the Life and Energy of the Churches

The excellent study of early Christianity by Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity, (Princeton University Press, 1996) includes historical and statistical detail that is most helpful to anyone who would understand the growth of Christianity anciently, and the prospects for Christian conversion and missions, today. In this issue of the LION we copy some of his material regarding just one small aspect (from chapter 8) of the larger study:

"One need not look far to find examples of anemic congregations plagued by free-rider problems—a visit to the nearest liberal Protestant church usually will suffice to discover "members" who draw upon the group for weddings, funerals, and (perhaps) holiday celebrations, but who provide little or nothing in return. ...They weaken the group's ability to create collective religious goods because their inactivity devalues the compensators and reduces the "average" level of commitment.

However, far more striking examples are found in sects and cults. In such groups, which can survive only with high levels of commitment, the costs of free riding are laid bare. Consider, for example, the Shakers' problems with transient members. These so-called winter Shakers would join Shaker communities in the late fall, obtain food and shelter throughout the winter, and then leave when employment opportunities had improved (Bainbridge 1982).

During the time Lofland and I observed them, the Moonies encountered similar difficulties with "exploiters" whose motives for joining conflicted with or undermined the goals of the movement. Some merely "attempted to extract some nonreligious benefit from the [Moonies], such as inexpensive room and board, money, ... or sex" (Lofland 1977:152). Others actually attempted to use participation in the group as a base from which to recruit customers for their own, competing, spiritualist churches.

Free riding was by no means unique to the Shakers and Moonies. Most of the nineteenth-century communes studied by Hine (1983) and Kanter (1972) were afflicted with "commitment problems." This perverse dynamic threatens all groups engaged in the production of collective goods, and it pertains to social and psychic benefits such as enthusiasm and solidarity no less than to material resources. It would seem that religions are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, a congregational structure that relies on the collective action of numerous volunteers is needed to make the religion credible. On the other hand, that same congregational structure threatens to undermine the level of commitment and contributions needed to make a religious group effective. However, costly demands offer a solution.

Furthermore, for a religious group, as with any organization, commitment is energy. That is, when commitment levels are high, groups can undertake all manner of collective actions, and these are in no way limited to the psychic

realm. For example, because Mormons are asked to contribute not only 10 percent of their incomes, but also 10 percent of their time to the church, they are thereby enabled to lavish social services upon one another—many of the rewards for being a Mormon are entirely tangible.

These propositions lead to a critical insight, perhaps the critical insight: Membership in an expensive religion is, for many people, a "good bargain." Conventional cost-benefit analysis alone suffices to explain the continued attraction of religions that impose sacrifices and stigmas upon their members. This conclusion is, of course, in extreme contrast with the conventional social science view that to pay high religious costs can only reflect irrationality, or at least woeful ignorance. However, more sophisticated analysis reveals that members of strict religious organizations have substantial reason to believe that their information about compensators is sufficient and thus their behavior fulfills the rational choice proposition. This suggests why the recent introduction of rational choice theories into the social scientific study of religion has been recognized as a major shift in paradigms (Warner 1993)—the irrationalist position is in full retreat.

Against this theoretical background, I should like to reexamine early Christianity. How much did it cost to be a Christian? Is it plausible that these costs strengthened the commitment of the group? Was Christian commitment translated into this worldly rewards to the faithful? In short, was Christianity a "good deal?"

CHRISTIAN SACRIFICES

Christians were expected to do much for their faith. A substantial list of "do nots" departed from pagan norms and practices. But equally costly were the things Christians were expected to do, and, it was hoped, to do gladly—care for the sick, infirm, and dependent, for example.... "

Those who have read The Rise of Christianity will understand how these sacrifices typically came back as practical rewards. For example, the survival rate of Christians during the terrible plagues of the first three centuries was two to three times better than that of pagans. The pagans, even temple priests and doctors, would flee from conta-

gion rather than stay and nurse the already sick pagans. Christians would stay during plagues and nurse their neighbors (both Christian and pagan) and insure them a superior survival rate. Many found this work of the Church attractive enough to cause them to convert to the Faith. Christian women would never consent to abortion or infanticide as a "solution" to their pregnancies. This principle of not murdering their young insured Christians a vast demographic advantage over the pagans who routinely murdered all female children after their first born. Fewer than one in a hundred pagan families would raise more than one female child. As a result, the population of the Roman Empire consisted of about 125 to 140 men for every 100 women.

It would appear that today many "free ride Christians" have values that are not very different than those of the secular, spiritually indifferent, population of unbelieving pagans. How many "baptisms" and "weddings" are fraudulently performed on behalf of people who fake just enough interest to get a church service. Of course, often such people are the cousins of members who are Christians. The behavior of the "free riders" is exceedingly tiresome for Christian believers. Why do the "free riders" seek out Orthodox Christian Churches when most of "main line" protestantism exists to serve them, and panders to their self importance, secular assumptions, and lack of commitment? The free riders are probably bored around people who are as inert and spiritless as themselves. -JCC

The Fourth
Annual
Crafters' Fair is
big news at St.
Mark's for
October 26.
With the Craft
Fair will be the
very popular
English Tea &
Luncheon, The
Bake Sale,
and the St.
Edward Martyr
Yard Sale !



Please notice the
Visit of His Grace,
Bishop Basil to St.
Luke's Parish in
Lafayette, Colorado
scheduled for the
Saturday and
Sunday following St.
Luke's Day in the
Kalendar. Bishop
Basil will attend
Vespers on Saturday,
October 19 at 5:00
PM, present relics of
holy Martyrs for the
Altar, and stay for a
Reception. All are
welcome.

The St. Mark Bookstore is newly stocked with
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Deborah C. Connely, staff photographer.

The Lion

St. Mark's Parish
1405 So Vine Street
Denver, CO 80210-2336
Address correction requested

English Tea Menu

Choice of :

Beef broth vegetable
soup

- or -

Split pea soup
with

Egg or tuna salad
croissant

\$ 3.50

Cornish pastie & green
salad

\$ 3.50

Scones & cream with pot
of tea

\$ 3.00



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